

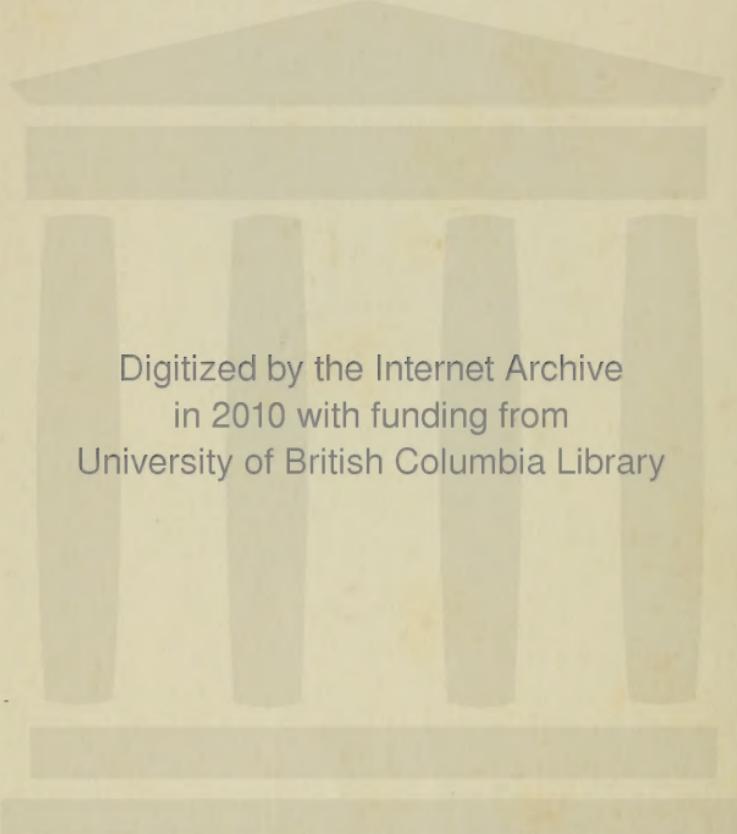
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SIR THOMAS MORE

SIR THOMAS MORE

AN HISTORICAL PLAY IN FIVE ACTS

BY

ARCHIBALD DOUGLAS FOX

LONDON

ARCHIBALD CONSTABLE AND COMPANY
LIMITED

1905

Edinburgh : T. and A. CONSTABLE, Printers to His Majesty

ERRATA

- P. 30, line 1, note of interrogation after ‘unoffending.’
- P. 31, line 9, *for* ‘intercharge’ *read* ‘interchange.’
- P. 40, line 6, *for* ‘essence’ *read* ‘essences.’
- P. 85, line 3, *for* ‘sadden’ *read* ‘sadder.’
- P. 87, line 8, *for* ‘enchance’ *read* ‘enhance.’

Edinburgh : T. and A. CONSTABLE, Printers to His Majesty

TO
HAROLD ELSDALE GOAD
THIS, HIS FIRST BOOK, IS DEDICATED
WITH GRATITUDE AND LOVE
BY THE AUTHOR

SIR THOMAS MORE

PERSONS REPRESENTED

KING HENRY VIII.

THOMAS CRANMER, *Archbishop of Canterbury.*

SIR THOMAS AUDLEY, *Lord Chancellor in Act III.*

THE ABBOT OF WESTMINSTER.

THOMAS CROMWELL, *Secretary to the Council and afterwards to the King.*

SIR EDWARD WALSINGHAM, *Lieutenant of the Tower.*

SIR THOMAS POPE.

SIR JOHN MORE, *Father of Sir Thomas More.*

SIR THOMAS MORE, *Lord Chancellor in Act I.*

JOHN MORE, *his Son.*

WILLIAM ROPER, *his Son-in-law.*

PATTERSON, *his Fool.*

CASLIDIUS, *a foreign Scholar.*

LADY MORE, *second Wife of Sir Thomas.*

MARGARET ROPER, *his Daughter.*

MARGARET CLEMENT, *his adopted Daughter.*

DOROTHY COLLEY, *Waiting-maid to Margaret Roper.*

MISTRESS CROKER.

A Boy and a Girl, *Grandchildren to Sir Thomas.*

A Pursuivant, a Baker's Man, a Sergeant, Citizens, Soldiers, Servants, and a Headsman.

SCENE—*In or near London.*

TIME—1531 to 1535.

A C T I

(1531)

SCENE I.—THE CHANCERY.

ROPER and CROMWELL *present.*

CROM. Prithee, kind Master Roper, let me count
Upon your furtherance to establish firm
My favour with Sir Thomas.

ROPER. It is noised
Through all the city that the King himself
Inclineth to your projects readily.
What need you else?

CROM. The King is great and high,
Gracious indeed, but o'ermuch hedged about
With spriteful noblemen to mark the words
Of one so humble.

ROPER. There's another tale
Than public rumour telleth.

CROM. In good sooth
His Highness doth not utterly withhold
Even from me his ear; but, knowing well
That from this lowly brain great things may
spring

Tending to England's honour and his own,
 I would have many voices on my side
 Of men high placed and noble in their acts,
 Like unto my Lord Chancellor, whose word
 Might cover trifling indirections ; thus
 May be achieved with glory whatsoe'er
 I set in motion.

ROPER. Marry, not so fast !
 'Tis true Sir Thomas hath some tenderness
 Toward you for the honourable force
 With which you dared defend in open court
 The falling Cardinal—

CROM. Some tenderness—
 Let it increase ; as to your worthy self
 Shall mine if you can bring my will to pass.
 I grudge not gold to them who do me service.
 ROPER. Listen, good Master Cromwell. Long

ago

I spake unto Sir Thomas merrily,
 Not so much wishing for the thing I craved
 As trying him for silly idleness.
 'My lord,' quoth I, 'when the great Cardinal
 Was here installed, not only they who thronged
 Freely his privy chamber gat great gain,
 But lowly doorkeepers and menial knaves :
 Yet I, who wedded thine own daughter, stand
 Unfee'd of any. Thou art overprompt
 To answer all men, be they rich or poor.

Many indeed beseech me, clinking gold,
To bring them to thy presence, deeming sure
My favour may be bought, and thereby thine,
Whom or I must refuse and so abide
Poor and unworshipful, who might win high
In estimation, or I take the gift,
And, nought achieving, only am reviled
Of the empty-handed giver.'

CROM. What said he?

ROPER. Softly, according to his wont, he answered,
Saying he might do pleasure in some sort
Unto my friend and me—perchance a word,
Perchance a letter given in commendation,
Perchance a speedier hearing, if the same
Should nowise wrong another, or an end
Unto his cause by mild arbitrament;
'But this one thing,' quoth he, 'upon my
faith

I tell thee,' and thereat his tranquil brow
Grew heavy, for in justice he is grave
And stark in honesty, 'If 'twere for me
To make decision, and my father laid
A suit against the devil, and implored
Of me, his child, a writhen judgment, still
Would Satan have his due.'

CROM. Unshaken heart !
Why, friend, I did but jest with you, and ne'er
Would countenance truth-twisting.

ROPER. It is well,

Else would your gain be little. You recall
Giles Heron—him that wedded Cicely,
Sister unto my Margaret?

CROM. What of him?

ROPER. He laid a suit in Chancery, and naught
Would satisfy his lust but judgment given
Wholly upon his part. The Chancellor,
Knowing his cause the worse, incontinent
Decreed against him.

CROM. Like an honest judge.
Spare not, good friend, to let him understand
How in my poor opinion he doth well
To yield unswerving justice, which with pains
And all the little eloquence I have
Will I commend unto the King. Farewell;
Be studious in these matters.

ROPER. Fare thee well.

[*Exit CROMWELL.*

Too swift a change, glib master; I shall mark
Your further dealing.

Enter MORE and two Clerks.

MORE. These forthwith convey
To my Lord Treasurer, with acknowledgment
And greeting; these unto his reverend Grace
At Lambeth; each with speed. [*Exeunt Clerks*
My toils are done.]

ROPER. Hast thou then stilled the fellow who so
railed

Against a Smithfield officer?

MORE. He left

His railing and is gone.

ROPER. Thrice happy thou
Thus to have power on anger! and indeed
'Twould seem that every way thine happiness
Is at the height, so perfectly thou hast
His Highness' liking and the Lords' goodwill,
The Commons' blessing and a wide repute
With learned men and holy Church.

MORE. The flood!

ROPER. How sayest thou, the flood?

MORE. The ebb will come.
Mindst thou, son Roper, once when thou and I
Were wending homeward by the river bank,
I told thee of a surety, could I know
Three certain things accomplished, then a
sack

Dropped in the Thames were home enow for
me?

ROPER. Ay, the conditions ran that Christian
kings,

Then vexed with strife, should keep a Christian
peace,

That growing heresy should be destroyed,
And the King's matter ended honourably.

MORE. So say I now. This light and brittle
truce,

Reared on no firmer base than mutual fears,
Bargains unclosed and traitor plans unripe,
Is but a sapling on a grim cliff edge
When all the east is ominous with cloud.
So is't in Europe. Here in our own land
Springeth to ear unhallowed doctrine sown
By Tyndale and his fellows. Nay, I glance not
At thine own falling off, thy moment's doubt ;
But now these Brethren, as they style them-
selves,

Die gladly in their error. I myself,
God knoweth with what passion of regret,
After what striving that a clearer light
Should break upon them from mine own poor
words,

Gripped by the law and powerless to forgive,
Have given sundry heretics to death.

ROPER. A moment's death, but, after penance
done,

To calm beatitude of deathless life.

Men say they perished praying for thy soul.

MORE. Oh, may those prayers, hereafter purified,
Mingled with intercession of true Church,
Ascend to Heaven for me. Stoutly they died
Like brave men trusting in a godly cause.
Themselves I hold in honour, but their faith

Hath reddened Germany with blood, hath reft
Young souls from virtue, teaching that his
deeds

Avail not man at last, and, if it grow,
Will break all order, all authority

Of King or prelate. Therefore must they die
That all men else may live. Have I not cause
To fear lest these may thrive? But more
than all,

More than the savage tyrannies of men,
More than the crawling blight of heresy,
Dread I this matter of the King's divorce.

ROPER. Hath he again assayed to overturn
Thy firm-knit purpose?

MORE. Ay, and seemeth scarce
Willing to brook that men should hold their
way

Evenly, bending not to either side,
Nor meddling in the matter.

ROPER. He is fixed
To wed this Mistress Bullen, who with charms
And Paris witcheries doth lead him on
To snap the bonds made fast by Holy Church,
And leave our virtuous Queen; which to
achieve

He fain would gather any argument
From any side, and, knowing thou hast trod
Far on the track of knowledge, doth desire

With thine assent to ratify his course,
 Yet he so loveth thee and heapeth signs
 Of grace upon thee that I scarce may deem
 He would enforce thy tongue against thy
 mind.

MORE. Thou knowest not the King.

ROPER. True, sir, I speak
 The vulgar talk.

MORE. If thou didst thoroughly know him,
 Thou shouldst perceive that if my severed
 head
 Might win one city from his enemies,
 This trunk were early widowed.

ROPER. Yet I trust
 Unwittingly thou dost him wrong.

Enter Usher with MISTRESS CROKER.

USHER. My lord,
 This lady craveth audience. [Exit.

MORE. Gentle dame,
 Rest here, and at your leisure break with me
 What is't you lack.

MRS. CR. Most learned, wise and good
 Of all good, wise and learned Chancellors,
 Meaning yourself, that ever graced this isle,
 This goodly, glorious, wise and learned isle,
 Nay, I would say this fulgent—nay, this isle,
 This very England which the seas embrace,

As all men know and testify thereto,
Which far have fared and giantly have dared
Its cannon.

ROPER. Worthy madam, with your speech
My lord is flattered, but, since time doth
press,
He fain would learn your need.

MRS. CR. And am I not
In act to set it forth? A righteous need
Not without honour or to him or me,
A need indeed which few men seldom seek—
Said I ‘few men’? nay, nor few women neither,
To forward—a just need—

ROPER. The suit itself
And not its attributes, were well to hear.

MRS. CR. Go to! go to! disturb me not. Most
wise,
Potent, serene and knowledgeable judge
Who ever graced the wide and ample seas
Which England doth embrace.

ROPER. Madam, the suit.

MRS. CR. Plague on you, varlet; puny malapert!

ROPER. ‘Varlet’ and ‘malapert’!

MORE. Enow, son Roper.
Methinks thou wilt gain worse than thou be-
stowest.

This visit, lady, is a courtesy
Which I esteem, as truly who would not?

Now, ceremony done, it scarce can need
I should recall to one thus gently bred
As your deportment, madam, doth proclaim
you,

That I am ever pressed and would at once
Give ear under your-business.

MRS. C. That shall you.

Marry, what an abounding difference
Lieth betwixt yon clown and such a lord.
Touching my wish—not often, I surmise,
Or should surmise, if to surmise at all,
Saving your presence, could become me—
here

In one brief word it lieth sans addition
Or ornament or compliment, though sure
Something I had designed to utter—here
It lieth—for an hearty New Year gift
You will vouchsafe to honour these poor
gloves

With fair acceptance, for I bear in mind
How in my suit against my lord the Earl
Of Arundel, so noble in his name
And station, but less noble in his deeds,
You did sustain me.

MORE. As a New Year gift,
A lady's gift, I take them thankfully,
They are full finely wrought.

MRS. CR. My gracious lord,

Spare so to gaze on them, but take them up,
Haply their inner side may like you best.

[MORE, taking up the gloves, discovers a
number of gold coins.

How now, Sir Thomas, like you that side best?

MORE. Madam, not so. This gift of your good-will,

Only in kindness rich and not in price,
With like goodwill I here accept of you.
The rest, your moneys, proffered as reward
For justice done, I utterly refuse.

MRS. CR. Refuse! they be forty of them!

MORE. Were they thrice
The number, yea, a hundred thousand times,
Yet would I none of them. Therefore, fair
lady,

Pouch you this mountain of your gold again.

MRS. CR. What! am I waking? Forty golden
pounds.

What! twice a score of shining pounds of gold
Stamped with His Highness' image! Fare
you well,

You were right wise and gracious in my
suit

Against Earl Arundel, and much for that
I thank you. Saintly Martin! I will hence,
Alack that greatness must disease the wit.

[Exit.

MORE. A merry dame still bursting with a dram
Of speech unuttered.

ROPER. I had heard her out.

Sir, sir, much might be wrought with forty
pounds.

The worthy dame much yearned to give; her
suit

Is long concluded, and no gift could change
The tenour of thy judgment.

MORE. Yet, my son,
Judgment might come to be the prize of gifts
Hoped for, in place of given. What good
there?

Nay, nay; no golden stain! Justice is fixed
Like some broad rock vexed of tumultuous
floods

But motionless for all their buffeting,
Not stirred because the wild North cry 'Give
way,

Lest I should overthrow thee utterly,'
Not shifting though the traitor South may
pause

A moment from his onset, whispering low
A promise of sweet odours with the dawn.
Come, art thou ready for the winds thyself?
Ere twilight falleth, let us forth and home.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE II.—MORE'S HOUSE AT CHELSEA.

Young MORE *playing upon the lute.* SIR JOHN MORE, LADY MORE, and MARGARET ROPER *present.*

SIR J. MORE. It groweth nigh to dusk. Where art thou, Mercy?

MARG. ROP. Grandsire, she is without, mixing a bowl

To feed the brutes withal.

SIR J. MORE. What, Meg, is 't thou?
Set straight thy father's chair. What is the paper

Folded and set therein?

LY. MORE. Some trumpery,
I warrant you.

MARG. ROP. 'Tis but an exercise
In Latin, that my sister Dauncey writ
To greet his coming.

LY. MORE. Trumpery indeed!

SIR J. MORE. Not an her verses match his Latin screed

When at Saint Anthony's he did astound
Master and scholars with his readiness.
Ay, children, 'tis a merry lad and apt,
Will grace his father yet.

LY. MORE [aside]. Dotards must fall
Back to their foolishness.

SIR J. MORE. I kept him close
On pilgrim fare and scant allowances ;
Proved I not wise ?

MARG. ROP. Ay, for he often saith
'Twas well to know adversity betimes.

LY. MORE. Why dally they to vex me ? It is
late.

SIR J. MORE. Know you, good daughter, which
of all the gifts

That dower my son provoketh wonder most ?

LY. MORE. I know not, sir; belike that he can mix
Thy posset rarely.

SIR J. MORE. 'Tis that even thy tongue
With him in presence groweth kind and meek.

LY. MORE. Tush, tush ! [To Y. MORE.] Why
laughest, boy ? Art thou the oaf
Thy tutors named thee ?

[A loud laugh within.

Peace ! How now ? What noise
Within ?

Enter a Servant.

SERVANT. A gentleman who bade me say
He knoweth you, doth crave he may address
His salutations to you.

LY. MORE. Bid him enter.
Heaven send my tippet be not disarrayed.

Enter KING HENRY and PATTERSON, hand in hand and with solemn faces.

Saint Bridget! who approach? His Highness' Grace,

Marshalled, ye piteous Heavens, with the fool!

PAT. Madam, your servant Harry Patterson

Commendeth his dear brother Harry Tudor,
Beseeching you to greet him with a look
Less bitter—sweet.

LV. MORE. Out, wretched, witless loon!

Back to the kitchen and a grievous fast.

PAT. Troth! Kitchen rather spellethe brave repast.

Speak for me, brother Harry.

KING. Fair Dame More.

Vex not, I pray, with frowns that lineless brow,

Nor this good fellow with a lack of meat.

LV. MORE. Your Grace is full of mercy and compassion.

PAT. Brother, you are a kind and virtuous brother,

And I will do by you as you by me,

When, the cock veering, we too change about,
I King, you fool.

KING. Till then we be sworn brothers.

How farest thou, Sir John? This green old age

Is good ensample unto us who lag
Some twoscore years behind thee.

SIR J. MORE. May twoscore
Glad years unshadowed of disease or grief
Await your Majesty.

KING. Threescore for thee,
Fair Mistress Roper. Grant me leave to
place
A royal salutation on that cheek
Which droopeth modestly. Shrink not away
Nor be not coy ; the Kings of England love
Not one, but all their lieges.

PAT. Then your Grace
May kiss the antique visage of Sir John,
Or Harry Patterson's.

KING. Be silent, brother,
Five minutes by the clock, if so thou mayest,
A groat for each, a King for surety.

LY. MORE. Fie
Upon thee, daughter Meg ! Be not so coy.

KING. So thou art won to brook this tenderness.
[*Kisses MARGARET ROPER.*

Now certify me that it grieved thee not,
By laying on the strings of yonder harp
Thy snow-white fingers.

MARG. ROP. That, your Majesty,
Shall your poor servant with more will than
skill.

[*Sings.*]

Autumn wind,
Tarnished gold,
Fates unkind,
Love is cold.

Bitter air,
Music fled,
Branches bare,
Love is dead.

Enter MORE and ROPER behind.

Phosphor waketh
April morn,
Blossom shaketh,
Love is born.

June beguileth
Birds to sing,
Cupid smileth,
Love is King.

KING. A puissant monarch with the world for
realm !

Thy voice, fair mistress, matcheth with thine
eyes,

Both meek and soft.

MORE. Both clear and wholly true.

Your pardon, Sire ; this honour done the house
Findeth me as beholding as are these

Whom I perceive thus merrily disposed
About you.

KING. Worthy my Lord Chancellor,
Thou knowest me no less a tender friend

Than a contented master. I beseech thee
Disturb not for my sake the wonted rule
And order of the house.

MORE. At eventide
We pass an hour in pleasant merriment,
Song, dance, relation.

KING. Truly, well appointed.
Here is a merry muster. Let us match
Our cunning paces with the instrument.
Afterwards shall I hold thee for a while
To business.

MORE. This were granted readily
Unto a lesser suitor. [To Y. MORE.] Go, fetch
music,
And bid thy sisters hither.

Y. MORE. Sir, I will. [Exit.
KING. Hath thy good sire new letters from the
hand
Of old Erasmus?

MARG. ROP. Ay, your Grace, he bade
Humbly commend him to your Majesty.

KING. Spake he of Master Froben and his
friends?
Thou knowest, having passed thine Academe,
What new thing lieth in the printing-house
At Basel?

MARG. ROP. Further treatises of Plato,
If't please your Majesty, with Cicero

De Senectute, which Pope Leo praised,
And divers minor matters.

KING. Dost thou hear
Aught of our marriage matter?

MARG. ROP. Nay, my lord,
I am too raw, too little of the world
To hear such questions weighed.

KING. But skilled enow
To call that question which is known for sure.
Od's faith, we marvel much that any doubt
Can live where every evidence doth point
One only way.

*Re-enter Y. MORE with MARGARET CLEMENT
and another Lady.*

MORE. Strike up your instruments.
KING [to LY. MORE]. Lady, this lily hand.

[*A dance.*

Madam, thy paces truly fit thy fame
As dancer. Thou art surely of descent
From light Terpsichore.

LY. MORE. Tilly-vally, Sire,
Your Highness deigneth flattery.

KING. By Saint John,
Not I! Now must we say, though heavily,
'Enough of pleasure.' My Lord Chancellor,
Eheu fugaces! if old Horace found
Long years quick-gliding, by how much themore

Speed winged moments. Marshal hence, I
pray,

This goodly company to whom our thanks
Are for their entertainment plenteous.

That done, return, and let us hold discourse
Alone.

MORE. Lead all away. His Grace would have
A little privacy.

[*Exeunt all but KING HENRY, MORE, and
SIR JOHN MORE.*]

Come, dear, my father,
Rest on my shoulder.

SIR J. MORE. These mine ancient limbs
Are less obedient to the King's decree
Than is my spirit.

KING. Well, what penalty?
Thou wast a judge: pass thou the doom on
them.

[*Exeunt MORE and SIR J. MORE.*]

He is a faithful servant and a wise,
Keen and far-seeing, looking not to fill
His privy purse with foreign moneys cast
As bait to trap his loyalty. His wit
And duteous readiness were sweet to me;
Would I might keep him forward as of old
In all that toucheth me, but wheresoe'er
Peereth the shadow of a menace aimed
Against the Pope, he faltereth. Be it so!

I take the royal road, and whoso lag
Being chosen comrades, let them keep a watch
Lest they should hap to perish by the way.

Re-enter MORE.

Let us at once to the issue. Thou wilt stand
Surety that unto thee I ever showed
A kind and gracious lord.

MORE. So with the seal

Did you make promise, and a monarch's word
Is like the arched sky, inviolable.

KING. I nothing doubt thy heart is full of love
And duty, of the which I have most need,
Beset with pestilent priests who rob their
flocks

And me their prince.

MORE. Their many heinous lusts
Have been a plague spot on the commonweal,
But much of late the Parliament hath worked
Under your favour, to amend the law
And keep their hands from picking.

KING. Let them have
A stern, strong-handed master, and their sins
Will perish with the hopes which feed them.

MORE. So
It may be with their plots, but these vile deeds,
Better unnamed, that smirch their sacredness,
Do flourish in the dark and gather grossness

In secret places. We have nipped indeed
The itching finger of the priest, and taught
That one man should be shepherd to one
flock,

Nor wander from it. So the law may touch
The secular, and much it may effect
To check the hawking friar, and somewhat too
'Gainst cloistered vices; yet the surest hope
Lieth in spread of knowledge. But belike
Your Majesty is weary of my words.

KING. Nay, I will hear.

MORE. Then shall I liken it,
This knowledge, unto some full-flowing sea
Which beareth with a measured grace of motion
Upon a darkling coast; fair rivers famed
In classic numbers lend it force to roll
Higher and higher up the desolate beach,
Filling with freshness every little lake
Sundered erewhile from fellowship, but now
Sharing a changeful splendour with the flood.
Yea, by this knowledge and those winning arts
With which the fair humanities endow
Their votaries, bear me witness, mine
Erasmus,
The saintly scholar of Mirandola, he
Who thrilled the multitude in Paul's; three
men
Who linked new science with time-proven faith

And duty to God's Vicar upon earth—
By such means, an I err not, shall the dross
Which now encumbereth her be swept away
From Holy Church, the griefs of poverty
Assuaged, the hapless vagabond new fired
To earn with sweat such victual as may keep
His midnight steel unblooded. Avarice,
Envy, pride, lechery, sloth and gluttony,
Wrath and what else there be of sin, shall
know

A minished might, when stainless charity
Passing above him seraph-like shall wake
New beauty in the upward face of man.

So purged and dauntless in her undrained
strength

Shall England fare along the rocky track
To heights of calm renown. But let not us,
In ecstasy of hope for what may come,
Part lightly from such sanctities as lit
Our fathers through the desert paths, nor set
Our minds to change God's order; rather
march

With souls attuned to heavenly purposes
And fortified by stout fidelity
To ancient, high, and venerable things,
Beneath old banners into lands unknown.

KING. Ay, ay, much eloquence, large phrase!
I know

Whereto thou 'dst have me cling. The Pope
is Pope,

The King is King: what Tudor ever brooked,
From old Cadwallader down, the least attaint
Of bondage? True, the Pope hath many
powers,

Is prime expositor of that one faith
Whereto we hold unswerving; no desire
Have we to impugn one tittle of his rights,
Knowing them heaven-confirmed, but in this
matter

Of our unlawful wedlock with the spouse
Of a dead brother, he who granted then
The dispensation, Julius, did exceed
Authority. Thou knowest it.

MORE. My liege,
Since holy Clement hath upheld the bull,
I may not therewith quarrel.

KING. Why, thyself
Hast brought before our eyes clear passages
Culled from the Fathers, making plain beyond
A moment's doubt, our right.

MORE. As Chancellor,
So acting by your grace, not mine own will;
Being your servant I delivered them
Into your hand, but ne'er so played with
Heaven
As to give mine own warrant thereunto.

KING. Have not the Universities affirmed
This bond unlawful? Do the Bishops doubt,
Being grave and wise and honest, that it
standeth
Invalid? Do not our best councillors,
Thyself excepted, sing the selfsame note,
Norfolk our first in place, and Cromwell chief
In wisdom, Audley deeply versed in law,
All others?

MORE. All consent unto your will,
I hearken to that voice which God assigned
To sway my being till the extremest hour.
Alas! alas! did not your Majesty,
When first you led me trembling from the
shade
Of my dear-loved retirement, bid me look
Through glare of wars and wiles and policies
First unto God and after God to you?
And must I now, when one way your desire
And one way conscience pointeth, look to you
Before that other?

KING. When our health is touched
We grieve to find thee froward, but must hope
'Tis for a moment only. Get thee back
Unto such weighty writings as may bear
Upon the cause, hold converse with thy peers,
Seek from their clearer minds enlightenment,
And we who ever loved thee, keeping still

A like affiance as of yore, will prove
Kindly intentioned every way. And much
We hope thine errors, things but of an hour,
Shall yield to inward searching and discourse
Careful and profitable, which performed
We will speak further of them. Bring us now
With haste unto the water. Summon up
Our fellows.

MORE. Will your Majesty partake
Neither of meat nor wine?

KING. Great things of state
Too much require us. Call the rowers forth,
Whom we would freely wager thy brave fool
Hath rarely twitted. Bid them man the
barge. [Exeunt.]

ACT II

✓ (1532)

SCENE I.—MORE'S HOUSE AT CHELSEA.

LADY MORE, MARGARET ROPER, and CASLIDIUS
present.

LV. MORE. Your coming will be grateful to my lord

When he returneth from the Chancery,
Being, as doubtless you have heard it noised
Even in your foreign wilds, a man of mark
And estimation, stepping before all
Save the King's grace, whom all the Saints
preserve ;
And other two or three.

MARG. ROP. Grateful indeed,
Since to converse of fair philosophy
Was ever his delight.

CASL. Whosoe'er know
His name must know him courteous and
esteemed
Of mighty princes. I were slow indeed

For mine own sake to thrust myself upon him,
But I bear privy letters writ and sealed
By his twin brother in all noble study,
Master Erasmus.

MARG. ROP. Doubly welcome so,
But truly welcome for yourself alone.

CASL. Some certain books I have in charge for
him,

Newly imprinted after a device
Long years ago resolved on by himself.

LY. MORE. For me, since never I conceal my
mind,
This Greek whereof thy master and my lord
Are thus enamoured, is an idle thing
Designed to wean the brains of honest men
From honest toil. My welcomes liefer greet
The stranger, and in place of parchment scrolls
I'll give you a brave haunch and savoury cates,
Trusting to find you a stout trencherman.

CASL. True, *dulce est desipere in loco*,
Madam, our learned University,
Knowing the body lesser than the mind,
Assigneth it less meat, therefore with joy
I hold you to your promise.

MARG. ROP. Tell me, sir,
How fareth it with our wise, kindly sage
Of Freiburg?

CASL. Ever, while his years advance,

His daylong, nightlong labours onward bear
Until 'twould seem he shall at last attain
The sum of knowledge. In some after age
That only glimmereth now in fantasy,
When all things in just measure shall be
weighed,

And kings, alliances, and policies
Be lost in Lethe, men shall teach their babes
To link in duteous reverence two high names,
More and Erasmus.

Enter PATTERSON.

PAT. [sings.]

Break away, break away,
Prithee, prithee, break away?
Who shall stay, who shall stay,
Answer, answer, who shall stay?

[*Skips about the room.*

LY. MORE. Whence have you broken then, poor
jigging ape?

And as to who shall stay thee, that will I.

[*Snatches at him.*

PAT. Behold, behold, a portent in the sky!

LY. MORE. Where now? [Exit PATTERSON.

There is no portent. On his pate
Will I avenge this jackass jest. Thy father
Hath ever granted him too wide a licence.

MARG. ROP. 'Tis but an unoffending, faithful
knav.

LY. MORE. Call'st thou that unoffending By
Saint Bridget,

What were offence then? Come, sir, let me show
We can provide you fresher entertainment
Than witling jackanapes.

CASL. At your command.

[*Exeunt LADY MORE and CASLIDIUS.*

Enter MORE and MARGARET CLEMENT.

MARG. CLEM. Father, what may I do to serve
thee?

MORE. Stand

Looking thyself and smiling thy glad smile,
Naught else. Yet if thy moment's idleness
Require a task, search thou the garden brakes
And bring whate'er thou mayest of bright and
sweet.

[*Exit MARGARET CLEMENT.*

She passeth like a moonbeam palely pure,
Full of delight and wonder. Meg, all's done.

MARG. ROP. All done? What meanest thou?
Thy cheek is white.

Has anything mischanced thee at the Court?

MORE. Naught hath mischanced. I yielded up
my seal

Of office to the King. Doth it astound thee?

MARG. ROP. Nay, dear my father; but a moment.
Oft

Searching through what thou saidest I have
seen

This purpose which, with ne'er a straight
revealment,

Thou shadowedst forth. What brought thee to
the touch?

MORE. Thou knowest, Meg, how I have long
descried

Dark waters widening 'twixt the King and me.

MARG. ROP. I know it.

MORE. A while since he pressed anew
His marriage matter, sorely blaming me
As backward, with a heavy mien and stern,
Not, as before, with open intercharge
Of argument, but for the nonce it passed,
Then I with pain and diligence assayed
To serve him otherwise and hold far off
That peril; a vain hope, for evermore
In every council summoned, project shaped,
Alliance mooted, I alike espy
That all ways point unto one only end,
Which maketh me to tremble. The Pope's
power,

His high authority as God's vicegerent,
His acts, his dignities are all impugned
Or like to be. Not least this Annates Act
Despoileth him. Whither other things will
tend

Is food for saddest meditation ; fears
Hang heavy on the air. For mine own self
I may not bear a part in what must come,
So stood I bound to render up the seal.

MARG. ROP. Ay, bound indeed and straitly bound.

For ne'er

Thy tongue hath wronged thy conscience. And
what said
The King in answer ?

MORE. Kind he seemed and sad

For loss of one he cherished. Many words
Spake he in praise, and divers promises
He made to speed my after wants. But
such

As long have dwelt with him and learned his
mind,

Know that betwixt the menace of a storm
And its full fury he will interpose
An hour of shifting sunlight. Mark this, Meg,
There will be further doings in the matter.

MARG. ROP. Weigh it now, dear father. Griefs
at hand

Are all too heavy ; let not woes to come
Oppress thee ere the hour.

MORE. Nay, child, I speak

Nowise in dread of danger, which I love
As purging the pure metal of the base,
Only that, when the hour is imminent,

Thy tender heart be not a-sudden shocked,
Quia spicula prævisa minus lædunt.

MARG. ROP. Let it bring any menace, any woe,
There be who will not fail thee. Until then
Rest happy in thy deeds, find new content
In days unburdened. From that heavy brow
I'll pluck away the furrows. Like a witch
Deal I in charms, not of the nighted sort
Framed in deep caves with ghastly incantation,
But gentler magic stealing from an harp
And potent over care.

MORE. Begin thy spell.

Enter a Servant and PATTERSON.

SERV. My lord, here cometh Master Secretary
Upon immediate business, and in haste.

MORE. Bring him unto my library.

[*Exit Servant.*
Sir Fool,

Tell me how liketh you my lord the Mayor?
Methinks he sometime showed a kindness for
you.

PAT. Sir Fool, how liketh you my lord the Mayor?
He hath a presence vast, a portly air,
And once at Martinmas he did impress
Three groats upon this palm, wherefore I bless
And love him. On another holiday
His fellow brought me to the morrice play

And bade me, not unwilling, swallow up
A pasty, and drain dry the brimming cup.
Wherefore I love him as the lion loved
The lambkin.

MORE. So, if evil fortune fell
Upon me, you would doubtless very fain
Be of his household.

PAT. Why, let fortune be,
I 'll scoff at fortune, side by side with thee.

MORE. What if ill chance hath fallen? You
will go

Lightly to my Lord Mayor and love him well?
He will be good to you.

PAT. Why, if ill chance
Hath fallen; what—what—

MORE. 'Tis even so, poor friend,
I that was rich shall have my wealth no more,
And you must forth.

PAT. Ill jest! I pray you seek not
To cope with me in mirth, lest thunderbolt
Sudden destroy you.

MORE. Here's no jest. Alas!
Far liefer would I than a thousand crowns
Keep you about me.

PAT. It is but thy jest.
Alack, alack, sweet lady, is 't not so?

MARG. ROP. Be comforted.

PAT. I 'll not be comforted.

Master, I 'll not endure to go ; I 'll not
Be driven forth. I do abhor the Mayor
And all save thee ; thee only do I love.

MORE. Alas, poor heart ! Daughter, thy charms
anon.

Woe 's me ! devise thou many and many a charm
For many and many a parting.

[*Exit, with PATTERSON clinging to him.*

MARG. ROP. Lend me help,
Sweet mother Mary, soul of pity, keep
This brow serene and aspect unafraid,
That I may staunchly aid him. He must bear
Many and bitter things for conscience' sake,
Cries and reproaches from his dame, the tears
Of divers living by his bounty, turned
Adrift from sustenance, and many else
Reft of his guiding wisdom.

Enter ROPER.

Thou dost know ?

ROPER. Ay, and am new come from the water-
men

Who each and all aver they will not brook
Another service, will not uncomelled
Quit their kind lord.

MARG. ROP. He hath but little gold
Save from his offices, and may not keep
A train and retinue. There is no help.

ROPER. Nay, nor no help for England if all
tongues

Must be constrained to praise of Mistress
Bullen

And defamation of our lawful Queen.

MARG. ROP. 'Tis not pressed so far forth.

ROPER. Yet if such men
As thy wise father deem the skies too black
To walk beneath, what followeth? 'Tis affirmed
His Grace of Canterbury will not hold
His office longer, seeing how the Church
Must further draw and further from the Head
Of God appointed, and deriving straight
From blessed Peter.

MARG. ROP. These be weighty matters
Which women scarce may compass with their
wit.

ROPER. At noon I met thy father freshly come
From out the presence-chamber. Smiling soft,
'Son Roper,' quoth he, 'we can make more
speed

Since I have cast off that which loaded me
So sorely.' Then in pleasant wise he brake
Of what had passed, as touching his own
wealth

And worldly honour recking not a whit,
But jesting rather, as one telleth o'er
Some ended jeopardy. At last, a tear

Slow gathering in those eyes where mirth had
been,

Sadly he spake of how small maintenance
Henceforth remained him, and that we his
sons

And daughters, long time gathered round his
hearth,

Must find new shelter. ‘Sir,’ quoth I, ‘the
bond,

The love-bond, so tight drawn may not be
snapped.’

MARG. ROP. Nor shall not till the world have no
more love.

What further said he?

ROPER. After slight contention
Glad to be worsted, ‘From this day,’ he said,
‘Scarce more than one poor hundred pounds
remaineth

In yearly revenue ; so if we look
To live together, each must bear a part
In contribution. Yet not all too soon
Let us fall to the lowest fare, but first
(Here touched he on his boyhood’s bringing
up),

To that of Lincoln’s Inn, where many men
Of worship and good years abide. If this
We may not long support, we will step down
To New Inn fare, which many an honest man

Contenteth. If our slight ability
Here too be overtaxed, let us descend
To Oxford diet, where grave, ancient fathers
Be conversant continually ; and last,
We will with bags and wallets go a-begging,
Hopeful of alms, and sing at each man's door,
“Salve regina”—so keep company
Together merrily.’ He fronteth still
With equal mind all shocks of circumstance.

Re-enter MORE with CROMWELL.

CROM. My humble thanks, my lord.

MORE. ‘My lord’ no longer ;
Let me be named but what I am. We pass
Henceforth from costly banquets to plain fare,
From greatness to content. If littleness
Descend to nothing, I could well enact
The hermit, an mine orchard should afford
Due store of berries. Thou, dear Meg, shouldst
turn

To patient Grissel.

CROM. Wrong not so the King,
Who of his bounty will not let thee lack
A fair appointment.

MORE. What will be, will be.
Man seeth but a little, yet I know
My labours on this earth have reached their
end.

You hasten, Master Cromwell, up the steep,
And forward press with an assured gait,
Bold brow and ready hand. You now are
entered

Upon the service of a noble prince,
Wise, free, and liberal. If you deign to heed
My poor advice, you rather shall propose
In counsel—giving what he ought to do
Than what he can do, so shall prove yourself
A true and faithful servant, a right wise
And worthy counsellor; for if a lion
Knew his own strength 'twere hard for any man
To rule him.

ACT III

(1534)

SCENE I.—THE ROYAL PALACE AT GREENWICH.

CROMWELL *writing.* Enter CRANMER.

CROM. Hail, Lord Archbishop. Is your audience done

With the lean, grizzled wolf of Norfolk ; ha ?

CRAN. You do contemn the noblest in the land.

Have you yet seen the King ?

CROM. Ay, he is close

Closeted with the Frenchman, a fell rogue,

Nice in his essence and courtesies,

Swollen with wines and pedigrees ; the half

Even of our Court gallants cannot match him.

CRAN. What news ?

CROM. The King is not a little grieved

That More's name, after being set therein,

Is rased from this Attainder whereby fall

The Nun and her abettors.

CRAN. Cursed woman !

A trifler with God's power.

CROM. Man's power no less.

A fool, a tool, but dangerous—well, she dieth ;
So let all perish who concert a plot
Against the King.

CRAN. But More did never so,
Having no less of loyalty than love
For peace and order.

CROM. Still he doth not yield
A meek submission as good subject ought
Unto his sovereign's will.

CRAN. Another storm,
I fear me, threateneth him. This recent act,
Which by your courtesy I have o'er glanced,
Will be to him a stumbling-block.

CROM. The King,
When first this oath was mooted, fell on doubt
If More might safely be enforced to swear
Unto the whole, dreading lest men of note
Should thereby be offended ; but the Queen,
Strongly resolved to case her dignities
In very proof, prevailed it should be so.

CRAN. Then will assent beseem us.

Enter KING HENRY.

KING. All is well,
Whatever chance at Rome, we stand assured.
Our noble brother Francis doth assert
Anew his utter friendship.

CROM. We anew

Acclaim the sleepless prudence of our King
Which wardeth dangers off us, who like sheep
Gather about our shepherd.

KING. Have you put
In writing, as we bade you, this new Bill
And oath for the succession?

CROM. Most dread lord,
Your servant hath performed it. Both I hold.
Will't please your Highness hear them?

KING. Read forthwith.
CROM. [reads.] 'Most high, most wise, most
gracious lord and King,
This Parliament assembled, spiritual
With temporal Lords and Commons, taking
thought

For the best weal and safety of your realm,
Sadly remember what unholy broils,
What fell divisions and ensanguined feuds
Have risen from the grim arbitrament
Of rival claims unto this throne. Not least,
Bishops of Rome'—

KING. Ha, good! Bishops of Rome!
We stick not for the title, but 'tis well
He should be mindful what a brittle band
Holdeth our England to his fatherhood.

CROM. 'Bishops of Rome and the Apostolic See
Have shown them bold to place on sundry
thrones

Whom they affect, which practice we mislike—'

KING. Rather 'abhor.'

CROM. How but a little word
Of golden wisdom maketh clear the matter!
So will it read, 'which practice we abhor;
Wherefore, to forward unity and peace,
Tranquillity and wealth of all the land,
We do beseech your Highness lend an ear
To our petition, and with full assent
Of this High Court of Parliament, declare
Your spousals with the Lady Catherine,
Prince Arthur's widow, wholly null and void,
The offspring thereof illegitimate.'

CRAN. Were it not well to add 'as throughly
proven

By death of all such offspring save but one.'

KING. Nay; nay; proceed.

CROM. 'Further, your second marriage
With our most noble, high, and sovereign
Queen

Anne, your right dear and well-beloved wife,
True, perfect, and sincere for evermore.
So shall the Kingdom pass unto your sons
Born of the said Queen Anne, which failing, heirs
Female inherit. Whoso act or write
Against this latter marriage or the heirs
Born therefrom shall be counted treasonous,

Who speak 'gainst one or other without act,
Be guilty of misprision.'

KING. Straight and plain.
No dubitable passage to ensure
The doubter either way.

CROM. 'Twas thus intended
Of your most humble servant.

KING. 'Tis well drawn.
Read next the oath which all must take
thereto.

CROM. ' You shall bear faith and true obedience
To the King's Highness and his foresaid heirs
As by the Statute of Succession fixed,
And to no foreign prince nor potentate,
To whom if you have sworn an oath, the same
Shall you repute annihilate and vain.
The selfsame act with all your cunning, wit,
And power shall you maintain, with whatsoe'er
This present Parliament hath foreordained
With like intent. No hindrance nor no let,
Damage, nor derogation shall you work,
Nor aid work thereunto, so help you God
And all the Saints.' This oath shall each man
swear.

KING. Hereto can no man swear who wisheth
ill
To us and to our people, save by fraud.
We, having a most pitiful regard

To all our subjects, trust no evil thought
Nor devilish counsel may impinge upon
Simple obedience and true, righteous faith.
My Lord Archbishop here and certain others
We shall join with you, Master Secretary,
As High Commission for receipt of oaths.
Think ye that any will presume resist?

CROM. One prelate only—he of Rochester—
Proof against all benignity, is like
To dare defy your gracious ordinance.

CRAN. Alas, your Highness, eighty years have
sealed
His understanding from all touch of change.
He erreth not of will, but hath a mind
No darker than his wintry locks.

KING. Old men,
Looking for reverence, must refrain their
hands
From doubtful dealing. Let him have a
care !

What say ye of Sir Thomas More?

CRAN. On him
I trust with much persuasion to prevail.

KING. See that he maketh answer openly,
Nor leave him wrapped in silence.

CROM. He shall speak.
KING. Ay, he were best ! Think ye our sovereign
will,

After so much achieved, so many tamed,
Shall pass for him?

CROM. Nor for no other man.
Shall servants beard their master? God for-
bid!

KING. There is no head in all this land to-day,
Howsoe'er noble, howsoe'er revered,
But, an it hold a tongue that wag one jot
Against our majesty, it shall fall low.

CROM. Let Kings command and let all else obey,
As ancient laws decree and Holy Writ.

SCENE II.—MORE'S GARDEN AT CHELSEA.

*Enter MORE pursued by a Boy: each armed with
a wooden sword.*

Bov. Stand ho ! Achilles. Art thou craven ?
stand.

I, Troy's elect, defy thee utterly.

MORE. Woe worth the day—must great Achilles yield?

Have at thee, Hector!

[Exchanges a few passes, then exit.

Bov. Fly thee back to Greece.
[Exit, pursuing]

Enter MARGARET ROPER and a little Girl.

MARG. ROP. Here were dread deeds.

GIRL. This posy have I culled

From the green lane behind our orchard wall.

Tell me, sweet mother, how to call each flower.

MARG. ROP. These are the pale anemones of the
wood

Which love mild airs, great trees, and early
suns,

This celandine which hideth her soft face
From troubled skies, this ladysmock wherein
With smallest twinkling fingers elfin maids
For midnight frolic clad them.

GIRL. Can they frame

In sooth a robe of anything so small?

MARG. ROP. Ay, for themselves are oft too slight
of bulk

For mortals to espy them.

GIRL. Didst thou ever

Truly and with these very eyes of thine
Look on the elves?

MARG. ROP. Yea, that did I, dear wench,
With the mind's eye, whereof thou shalt know
more

Ere thou grow great. When sound the min-
ster bells

At dead of night, all grisly shapes take wing
Affrighted, and the elfin multitude
Upon a dewlit bank of sloping green
Join hands in a coranto. As they step,

From each a myriad points of sudden light
Gleam, for the heart of Cynthia loveth them.

GIRL. Is Mother Maniskill a grisly shape,
Whom once the beadle haled before my
grandsire

Calling her ‘witch’?

MARG. ROP. Nay, nay, an harmless dame,
Driven to ill contrivings by the drift
Of them who cry her wicked. Not a word
Replied thy grandsire, save ‘Let her go forth,
And aid her, if ye may, rather to live
Well than die ill.’

Enter MORE and LADY MORE.

MORE. The wars are all at end,
Troy saved, the Achæans beaten to their
ships,
Achilles hard bested.

LY. MORE. Why, *Bone Deus*,
I marvel much, Sir Thomas, that thou bearest
So light a heart when so much cause for tears
Appeareth in our fortunes.

MORE. Wouldst thou have
A sigh for every hour of every grief?

LY. MORE. Nay, but decorous heaviness, a mien
Speaking of what thou wast, a man high
placed,
Not trumpeting the little that thou art.

MORE. Sweetheart, be merry. Though I may
not like

Thy words, beshrew me but I love the lips
Which speak them. Let a kiss dry up the
fount

That seemeth welling to the offspring.

LV. MORE. Faith,
I do misdoubt me thou shalt have thy will
And I shall smile perforce, for none may grieve
With thee in presence.

MORE. What hast thou to rue?
A blaze of faggots on the winter hearth—
Think'st thou the blessed Saints waxed ne'er
a-cold?
A strip of ermine or a mantle tipped
With miniver, a crew of lusty knaves
And wenches crooking knees, the half-hushed
tones
Of rude mob voices, 'See how richly dight
Fareth the lady of the Chancellor'?

LV. MORE. Good lack, no inch of miniver have I,
But fare forth sadly.

MORE. There be darker clouds
Than such as veil our brightness from the
mob,
Yet even these may be endured.

MARG. ROP. [to the little Girl.] Go hence,
Dear chuck, and seek thy brother.

MORE.

Little Meg,

Let learning and fair virtue be thy meat
 And play thy sauce.

GIRL.

I love sauce. [Exit.]

MORE.

As I think,

Fortune should bear her victims hard indeed
 Ere they should blanch. In dire adversity
 Strength hardeneth and hopes cast off all
 hues

Mirky or dubious, and stand forth at length
 Translucent.

MARG. ROP. Is it not at tempest height
 That with his valiant note the stormcock
 shrilleth ?

MORE. Hearken, dear lady, how a wanderer sang
 Who fell 'mid evil men, but held his brow
 Sky-fronting and unseared of circumstance.
 Rehearse the ballad, Meg ; thou knowest it,
 Of Jacquemin, the rover of Guienne.

MARG. ROP.

Men took the sorry groats I had
 With blows and direful threatening.
 Must I then nevermore be glad ?
 Sing hey ! my lute hath yet her string.

They took my lute, they broke her string,
 My lute, the livelong day's delight.
 And shall I then to murmuring ?
 Sing ho ! mine eyes have yet their sight.

Irons they seized and quenched mine eyes,
That tenderly each face would scan.
Must I then crouch to miseries?
Sing hey! Death cometh soon to man.

They cry, 'For instant death prepare,'
Thereat great joy doth fill my breast,
All scathe men wrought me they repair,
Sing ho ! wealth, music, light, and rest.

Lv. MORE. Well, well, child—the event! what further chanced?

Did they with tortures end him?

MARG. ROP. 'Tis unknown.

Lv. MORE. A light and trivial tale without an end.

MORE. Madam, the end and epilogue were told
By a wraith only, in such faint, thin tones
Man might not hear them. Meg, thou
ponderest much.

MARG. ROP. I see a menace hang about thy brow.

What is it?

MORE. Keep thou a stout courage, Meg,
Whatever hap. [Knocking heard.] Hark, thou
shalt know directly.

Ly. MORE. What great one striketh so?

MORE. One not so great.

MARG. ROP. Yet haply with great news for good
or ill.

Lv. MORE. Who cometh running?

Enter DOROTHY COLLEY.

DOR. By the Blessed Saints.

Your pardon, noble lady. Please you, here
 Close without standeth an huge, fearful man,
 Master Purvissant, who, for only that
 I held him one half moment, doth protest
 He will attach me for contumacy
 To Master Secretary's Purvissant.

MORE. Admit the great one lest he act his threat.

[*Exit DOROTHY.*

Oft are they puffed up so ; regard him not.

Re-enter DOROTHY with a Pursuivant.

PURS. Make way, good people, by the King's
 command !

LY. MORE. None stay thee.

PURS. Peace, good dame. Behold me here
 High Pursuivant, by some termed first in
 place,

To Master Thomas Cromwell, Secretary
 To the King's Highness, Henry called the
 Eight,

Or Latinwise Octavius. Therefore, sirs,
 Retard not nor impede the setting forth
 Of solemn matters. You, Sir Thomas More,
 I charge you answer, be you Thomas More ?

MORE. I, Thomas More, am Thomas More
 indeed.

PURS. Then shall you, Thomas More, no let
allowed,

The morrow morn at Westminster appear,
Where like a trusty subject you shall take
An oath unto the Successional Act.

LY. MORE. How saith the man? What Act?

PURS. The late Act called
Act of Succession, Successional Act
In weightier parlance.

MORE. Certes I shall come,
Much honoured in the manner of my summons.

PURS. It hath in verity been so esteemed.

Now, the citation served, not, as I hope,
Sans proper courtesy, I take my leave.
Ladies, I greet ye. Let the people make
An ample space, nor press upon the heels
Of the King's Minister's prime pursuivant.

[*Exit with DOROTHY.*

LY. MORE. This oath, like a good subject and
wise man,

Thou mayst take readily.

MORE. The morrow showeth.
Tremble not, dearest Meg, for all is well;
Humbly I thank our God the field is won.

SCENE III.—A TAVERN IN LONDON.

WALSINGHAM and POPE *sitting apart*. At the opposite side three Citizens and the Taverner.

TAV. Bid me fill again, masters, lest they say that Merry England groweth pale and womanish for lack of the Pope's smile.

1 CIT. Hast a testoon, friend Gib?

2 CIT. Not I, good lack.

1 CIT. Hast a testoon, kind nephew?

3 CIT. Ay, that have I, and that will I spend for ye, holding surely that the Spaniard devil shall press his cloven hoof on English soil only to meet his death. Fetch forth four cups of honest English ale, good master Taverner. You keep no Italian venom for poisoning of Cardinals, I warrant you.

TAV. You well may; no hell-fire for me, if full draughts and fair dealing can save me.

[*Goes to the tap.*

1 CIT. Nephew Giles, I grow old apace, and grey heads are slow of understanding. Therefore say, what hath the Pope done that men do so furiously rage against him?

2 CIT. Ay, ay, what hath 'a done?

3 CIT. He hath so done, or so bidden do as

shall set all England against him. Now mark me and misreport me not—if I say aught against the Pope, I say naught against Holy Church nor her faith nor her doctrine, which I hold firm as doth King Harry and all good men, and ye shall bear me witness that all rogues of the Brotherhood I would give up to roasting an I might.

WALS. [aside to POPE.] Hearken; in the talk of these knaves we may hear that will make profitable our sojourn in this kennel.

POPE. A doughty man of affairs is yonder close-cropped rascal.

1 CIT. That was a brave draught. On with the tale!

3 CIT. Well then, ye know how Charles the Emperor hath moved to keep His Highness, whom God preserve—

1 CIT. Whom God preserve indeed with a special care, for he playeth lustily at the tourney.

3 CIT. Nay, uncle, that was a while back.

1 CIT. Be that as it may, he bowleth cunningly.

2 CIT. He drinketh ale like a brave man.

3 CIT. Well, well, the Emperor Charles moved to keep His Highness tied fast to the Lady Catherine, lest he should have an heir-male. For mark ye, the Lady Mary did stand sole

heir until the late Act was proclaimed, but now the blessed princess newly born shall reign over us when her father demiseth, which God set afar off. But the Lady Mary standing heir, the Emperor would fain wed her to his own Philip, whom they call the Infante in their foreign jargon, and who is but an infant indeed. Then, look ye, he would have set peak-bearded Dons to rule over us, and given us up to the hellish and accursed Inquisition.

- 2 CIT. What, would he have racked Gib Fallow?
- 3 CIT. That would he until your bones were as soft as my grandam's evening mess.
- 2 CIT. Why then, a pox upon him!
- 3 CIT. But I and our Lord Harry and all true men shall save thee.
- 2 CIT. Neighbour, say I 'a pox upon him!'
- 3 CIT. Nay, we will save thee, and well for thee, for the Pope, affrighted lest he too be thrown upon the rack, hath yielded up the King to excommunication, and given us all over incontinent to the Spaniard.
- 1 CIT. Why then, here's confusion to 'em.
- 3 CIT. Not even they who buy and sell the wool, like the rich man John Rakes, my cousin of Shoreditch, can speak good of the Spaniard to-day, for an he conquer he shall both buy

and sell, and that were but scurvy merchandise
for 'em.

1 CIT. Drink, Gib, confusion to the Spaniard!

2 CIT. What! rack my bones? a pox upon
the Spaniard!

1 CIT. You too, master Taverner.

TAV. Confusion to all yellow-visaged foreigners
that better like sour wine than honest ale!

3 CIT. Confusion and a curse upon the
Spaniard!

WALS. [*to POPE.*] You see how the wind bloweth,
and I indeed, who have no wool to sell, am
stronger still upon the part of yonder eloquent
rascal.

POPE. In faith 'twere pity we should quail now
before the stranger, who watered the green
shoots of our courages at Therouenne and
Flodden.

WALS. This only am I sorry for—'twill make
Cromwell the stronger, who, as Heaven
knoweth, doth require no fresh access of
strength, and readier for extremes against my
Lord of Rochester and Thomas More, whom,
like to all other men, I greatly love.

POPE. Some look askance at Fisher, saying that
he hath played with Spanish gold, and he is of
a surety over prone to think his cause lieth so
clear in justice that any means may be devised

to further it. Therefore do I the less lament his fate, but More tampered never with the King's enemies. What he holdeth that will he maintain and abide the peril, and never will he anything against the Pope's supremacy, which, as I think, shall stand no long while even in shadow. Yet is More English and true English, as these knaves here know not less than you and I, and scarce less honour him.

WALS. Why so he is true English, so has been, and so shall be to the end. The saints be with him. Shall we along? Fellow, take you your reckoning out of this.

[*Exeunt WALSINGHAM and POPE.*

I CIT. [sings.]

Hola, my gossips, hola, holo,
For the foam on the brown, brown ale,
For heads may grizzle and aches may grow,
But the brown will never pale.

Chorus.

But the brown will never pale.

SCENE IV.—A ROOM IN LAMBETH PALACE.

ARCHBISHOP CRANMER, *the* LORD CHANCELLOR,
the ABBOT OF WESTMINSTER, *and* CROM-
WELL.

LD. CHAN. A fair day's labour! Those who took
the oath

Make up this goodly roll.

CRAN.

We may descry

Plainly revealed herein the grace divine.

CROM. Ay, and man's wisdom, for Acts hedged
about

With penalties make slow tongues glib enow.

LD. CHAN. Three only were found stubborn.

Wilson counteth

For little.

CRAN. Yet I mourn that Satan's lure

Hath so ensnared my lord of Rochester.

Oft hath he won with sacred charity

Souls erring and hath made waste places fair;

Old too; his fingers trembled as he took

The scroll; not so his eye.

CROM.

Stubborn in youth,

Stubborn at his midday, and stubborn now,

But growing traitorous. Let him take the oath

Or reap such harvest as himself hath sown.

CRAN. Yet even you, good Master Secretary,

Who hold men's lives at such a little cost,

Will grieve for Thomas More.

CROM.

I love him well.

CRAN. May God in plenitude of mercy break

His resolution! Since the primal dawn

Gleamed upon Eden, never breathed a man

Who fronted Heaven with a clearer soul.

LD. CHAN. Too long we parley. Use all argu-
ment,

My Lord Archbishop, which your holiness,
Wisdom, and learning may provide.

[*Rings a handbell.*

Enter Usher.

Call forth

Again Sir Thomas More, that we anew
May question him. [Exit Usher.

ABBOT. Alas ! it will be vain.

CROM. And if it be so, though ye know I love
him,

Why, if it be so, let it be. The King
Hath other subjects, eager to obey
His will, and never froward.

ABBOT. He is come.

Re-enter Usher with MORE.

MORE [*aside*]. Ye martyr spirits, be about me now !

Again well met, my lords.

CRAN. Again we ask,
Trusting and doubting not that thoughtful care
Hath wrought in you, with zealous loyalty
For peace and union—will you take the oath
Alike to the succession and preamble?

MORE. I am confirmed.

CROM. Confirmed in what opinion,
Your old defiance, or a better mind ?

LD. CHAN. Speak, may we all rejoice or must we
weep ?

CROM. Bethink you well. 'Tis not from many
men

That we, appointed King's Commissioners,
Shall ask a second time their duty.

LD. CHAN. Speak,
Sir Thomas.

MORE. With all humbleness, my lords,
To you as noble in yourselves and raised
Higher by virtue of the King's command,
I do entreat you, press me not again,
For swear I may not.

CRAN. Surely Satan's work.

True, *optimi corruptio pessima!*
At least you will set forth what special part
Of the oath doth irk your conscience.

MORE. As I said
So say I. Trow ye it is not enow
I should displeasure the King's Majesty
With mere refusal? Would ye have me
fan
Embers of wrath into a flame?

LD. CHAN. What boot
To cry, 'This thing I cannot do,' and yield
No reason?

CROM. This were empty frowardness,
Nay, contumacy.

CRAN. Be not so accounted,
That ever wert held open as the day.

MORE. Ye press me sore, and, sooner than be held

Stubborn, thus much I yield. On licence given

By the King's Highness, which shall certify
My doing thus from special visiting
Of his displeasure, I will duly set
In writing all these causes, with a vow
That if such obstacles as now beset
My path be reconciled by any man
Unto my conscience, then will I submit
And take the main oath also.

LD. CHAN. No avail!

Though the King's Highness under letters patent

Should grant such licence, it might not avail
Against the Statute.

MORE. I would freely stand
At mine own peril on a perfect trust
In his high honour, were the licence given.

LD. CHAN. Enow of this. You ask what cannot be.

ABBOT. See, see, Sir Thomas, what a length of names

Is here recorded. All these worthy men,
The wise, the great, the learned, all have sworn,
And will you stand out still?

CRAN. Harken, Sir Thomas,

At our first questioning you said, albeit
Yourself refused the oath, you never might
Presume to damn the consciences of such
As have sworn.

MORE. That indeed I said and say.

CRAN. Perpend then! Since you have no cer-
tainty

That these do wrong nor that yourself do right,
And since you know beyond all shade of doubt
That you are straitly bounden to obey
Your sovereign lord, therefore beyond all
question

You must be bounden also to forgo
Doubts of an unsure conscience, and submit
Unto your prince.

MORE [aside]. May this be possible?
The one sure path of duty? He doth stand
A high-reputed prelate who would thus
Interpret me the truth. Can it be so?
Nay, he doth merely play the casuist
For sake of pity.

CRAN. Lo! he pondereth.
Urge him not overmuch.

MORE. This cause, my lords,
Appeareth in my judgment such an one
As will perforce compel me disobey
My prince. For whatsoever other folk,
Whose virtue or whose learning be it far

From such as I to impeach, may judge the right
Of the matter, yet in mine own soul I hold
Opinion other than His Majesty.
Nor on a sudden have I without cause
Informed my conscience, but by diligence
Of search and leisure set apart for thought.
Truly if, when the doctors hesitate,
The King's commandment given which way he
list
May soyle all doubt, we have a ready means
To solve perplexities.

ABBOT. Thus unto you
Seemeth the matter. Now behold—one side
You stand with Wilson and the old blind
Bishop,
On the other standeth the great Council, whole,
Unanimous. Doth not this give you pause?
MORE. Lord Abbot, if indeed my single mind
Were counter to the assembled Parliament,
Loth were I to withstand them, but alone
I am not—this the Council of one realm
Determineth, but that the larger voice
Of Christendom entire.

CROM. He will not swear.
Now by the gaping wounds of the Most High,
I had liefer see mine own son lose his head
Than you make answer thus, for certainly
The King will grow suspicious of your acts

Else buried, and misdoubt it was your drift
Wrought up to treasonous imaginings
The Canterbury Nun.

MORE. The contrary

Is true, as all men know. Let hap what will,
Man may not jeopard his immortal soul.

LD. CHAN. Delays are bootless. Master Secretary,

You go hence to the Court. Report these doings

E'en as they passed, naught added, naught construed

From its true purpose by your kindness.

That Lady Catherine lawlessly was wed

Sir Thomas will not swear; that the true heirs
Of Anne, our gracious Queen, shall wear the crown

Hereafter, he approveth. Have I given
Your purport truly?

MORE. I am well content

So that mine oath hereto be duly framed
That it may stand with conscience.

LD. CHAN. Mark that also,

I prithee, Master Secretary, this,
Even this he will not clearly swear outright,
But in some certain manner.

MORE. Nay, my lord,
When I shall see that so the oath is framed

As I may neither prove forsworn, nor wrong
Mine honour, then, then only will I swear.
For the Succession, truly that alone
Uncumbered with strange clauses well I might
Conceive me bounden to accept, but touching
The whole oath, otherwise. No man did I
Withdraw, advise nor make misdoubt, nor will
So do hereafter, since these matters lie
'Twixt each man and his conscience. For
myself
Only I judge, and likewise in good faith
Meseemeth it were well that every man
Should leave me mine own judgment.

CRAN.

Which we trust,

Though you be slow of vision, stiff of neck,
Shall change to wiser.

Ld. CHAN.

My lord Abbot, take

Sir Thomas to your keeping for the nonce,
Doubtless you will entreat him honourably.
Good Master Cromwell, let His Highness know
Forthwith what we have done, and what, alas !
Undone remaineth. Reverend Archbishop,
I would hold private conference with your
Grace.

A C T I V

(1535)

SCENE I.—THE PALACE AT GREENWICH.

KING HENRY *present.*

KING. So pass they surely forth, one after one,
Who dare to stand betwixt my will and me ;
I frown and they are gone ; so should it be
When subjects irk their kings. The Nun hath
sped
To her familiar fiends ; the stubborn monks
Have fared from out their Charterhouse to
prison,
From prison even to death. The reverend
locks
Of Fisher have not stayed this hand ; fool Pope,
You have paid smartly for that Cardinal's hat.
And now but one remaineth, grandliest dowered
Of nature and of fortune ere he turned
From duty to his private dreams of right.
Oft hath his wit delighted me and oft
His wisdom served ; no matter, he shall die.
Am I not King, and is not that high name

A bulwark unto consciences? This land
 Of England is but as a child to me
 Which I would fain make fair and strong and
 feared
 Of other mortals, but to me she oweth
 Obedience absolute, who know her good
 Must ever march with mine. So, if she dare
 Oppose a rebel deed, a doubting word,
 Nay, even an heavy look, to my command,
 Then must I visit her with chastisement.
 Ho there, within!

Enter a Gentleman.

It is the hour appointed.
 Send hither Master Secretary Cromwell,
 Whom we have bidden attend us.

[*Exit Gentleman.*

Now methinks
 This deed once done and well interpreted,
 I stand secure from opposition; then,
 If God vouchsafe me an heir-male, well pleased
 For that my lawless wedlock is undone,
 What other yearning have I?

Re-enter Gentleman with CROMWELL, and exit.

Enter straight

And baulk us not with phrases.

CROM.

'Tis enow

Of honour only to behold your Grace.

KING. This new Act duly passed, establishing
Ourself sole Head and Guardian of the Church,
Supreme, unchallengeable by the Pope,
Shall clear from out our path all obstacles.

CROM. And win your humble subjects greater
ease,

Who cannot serve two masters.

KING. Let the oath
Be strictly ministered, that none escape
The penalty.

CROM. Most awful, gracious lord——

KING. Hearken, Sir Knave, let not a man escape
The penalty. You are of the Commission,
See to it closely.

CROM. What your servant can,
That will he, showing with a gladsome mind
Utter obedience.

KING. Hence then. Bid attend
Sir Edward Walsingham. [Exit CROMWELL.
All's well in train.

My rascal faileth not.

Re-enter Gentleman with WALSINGHAM, and exit.

A fair good-morrow,

Master Lieutenant.

WALS. Humbly a good-morrow
Unto your Highness.

KING. Let me know at once

What manner of haviour doth Sir Thomas
More
Show in the Tower.

WALS. A perfect strength, your Highness.
Some who converse with him affirm he beareth
On his own showing such and only such
A dread of the last mortal act as lurketh
In the deep heart of all mankind, but naught
Of craven sheweth in his conversation.
That gentle courage which he ever wore
Like some fair badge of honour, not of pride,
Sustaineth him.

KING. How doth he pass the hours?

WALS. In pious exercise and frequent prayer
For all who ever loved him and for such
As proved them his ill-wishers.

KING. Of the which
Doth he presume to class us?

WALS. Of your Grace
He speaketh ever, as true subject ought,
With awful reverence and meek tenderness,
Recalling oft your bounty showered on him
In former days ere yet he lost your love.

KING. Trusting mayhap by such an intercession
As this you bring, he shall preserve his neck.

WALS. Be it not mine to doubt the happy aim
Of whatsoe'er your Highness deign to speak,
Yet, by your gracious leave, it is not so.

I cannot wrong him ; he doth look on death
As hard at hand, and fear, if fear at all
May chill his inmost thought, he sheweth not ;
Nay, once when one bemoaned his evil plight
To die in prison, he, with that wan smile,
Quoth, ‘ Heaven is not more far, when all be
said,

From one than from another place on earth.’
So oftentimes with grave mirth and sayings like
To them which erst he fashioned for the mouth
Of Raphael Hythlodaye, doth he beguile
The grim, slow-moving hours, and lacketh never
A merry word for friend or gaoler. Yet
This wit may kindle but enforced mirth
In other eyes, for unto heavy minds
Each jest, that else were lightsome, doth
appear

A sadder jest than ever the capped fool,
Grown dull and soured and scoffed at in his
age,
Might utter when all company was gone
To walls that echoed back his broken sigh.

KING. A moving picture, surely ! Take good
heed

You prove discreet, and noise not overmuch
This tale of yours abroad. Often men drown
Wisdom in pity. He will die ere long,
And we would have his death go by unmarked

As far as may be. Knowing there will come
About our ears a buzz of foreign tongues,
Let us be safe from subject disaffection.

WALS. Your Grace's will hath ever been my law,
Yet if it be permitted me to stir
A breath of doubt, the people deeply love
Sir Thomas More, and many a noble name
Is linked with his in true-knit brotherhood.
Not few will grieve.

KING. Tush, tush, man ! Ease your fears.
We dread not market voice nor noble name.
Do you your duty, Master Walsingham,
Keep watch upon your prisoners, see your
guards
Be bold and ready, but, for higher things,
Leave them to princes and to whom they choose
For helpers in their labour.

WALS. I have erred,
And crave your Highness' pardon.

KING. Set a watch
On your o'erzealous tongue. Saint Anthony !
We hear too much good counsel. Let it pass,
Be not abashed ; to-morrow eve we play
The tennis, be you present. We will show
New chases which my lord of Suffolk learned
Of Paris players.

WALS. I am overcome
With too much bounty. [Exit.

KING. One to use henceforth
But not too freely. ‘People’s love,’ quoth
he?
I have the people’s love, and well I know
To keep it. ‘Noble names’—have I not
learned
To check the fiery steed with rein and curb?
A truce to policy! I’ll turn to kings
Painted, and queens that bring a goodly
dower,
And knaves who only look their knaveries.

[*Exit.*]

SCENE II.—AN OPEN PLACE IN LONDON.

*Enter ROPER and Young MORE. Three Citizens
lounging about.*

ROPER. Here let us wait. Some one will chance
this way

From Westminster, and show us what hath
passed.

Y. MORE. A grievous task to wait.

Enter a Baker’s Man.

BAKER’S MAN. Who’s for fresh cakes—hot fro’
the oven and steaming? Hot cakes, ho!
Fresh o’ the morning! Who’s for hot cakes?
You, sir?

Y. MORE. Pray you, away.

BAKER'S MAN. You there, sir, you have an edible countenance ; what will you ?

3 CIT. A warm welcome for you and a warm cake for me. Lieth not wisdom there ?

[*They deal and talk together.*

Enter SIR THOMAS POPE.

ROPER. Well met, good friend. What news ?

POPE. You are prepared,
I doubt not.

ROPER. We hoped little.

POPE. 'Tis the direst
Man ever heard. He is condemned to die.

ROPER. Upon what day ?

POPE. It is not yet determined.

ROPER. Christ, that these truckling knaves pre-
sume to pass

Judgment on such as he ! And must he
die ?

Is there no voice to aid him ?

POPE. Would there were !
Many who showed him favour fall away,
Fearful of peril ; others dare not speak,
Dreading more highly to incense the King
Against his lady and yourself and you,
Young Master More.

ROPER. We fear not for ourselves.

POPE. Behold, the mob, that loveth spectacles,
Hath tidings of his coming. He will pass
This way anon.

Enter two or three Citizens.

ROPER. Then let us wait him here.

Y. MORE. Alas! what can I do?

POPE. Nay, weep not so,
Lest you should shame your manhood before
knaves.

Y. MORE. I weep for that I needs must bruise a
heart

Charged now to breaking betwixt hope and
fear.

In friendly arms hard by my sister waiteth
To hear the issue. Since you must away
Presently, hither shall I bring her up
To look her last upon him.

Enter more Citizens.

POPE. Keep your spirit
The bolder that it may confirm her own.

ROPER. I go to seek the Chancellor and wring
His heart with pity, if it be not stone.

[*Exeunt ROPER and Y. MORE.*

I CIT. One more spectacle, neighbour Gib, before
the old man die.

POPE. Fellow, why dost thou stretch thy neck
swanlike to see the length of the street?

2 CIT. Ha, 'swanlike,' quotha? 'Swanlike,' ha, ha!

1 CIT. Good sir, it is Sir Thomas who cometh along, with the halberdiers, brave fellows stepping out amain; Sir Thomas, honourable Sir, who some say will die to-morrow and some the day after.

POPE. Would you glut your eyes with sight of suffering?

1 CIT. Heard you the halberds? Cometh he hitherward?

2 CIT. Neighbour, keep down your elbows, I entreat you.

1 CIT. Did I not indeed hear the sound of halberds?

3 CIT. I saw the great Cardinal of York when he was stripped of his pillars, axes, and silver crosses, his knights and esquires, and all his pretty trappings, and little worshipful seemed he so despoiled.

1 CIT. I saw the head of my Lord Hastings dropping blood, drip, drip. Heard you, neighbour, 'drip, drip,' quoth I?—and women shrieking and the sky darkened.

3 CIT. Why then did my merry uncle see that which chanced part never at all and part when he was in Dover town, apprentice to the cordwainer.

1 CIT. What, boy, would you correct your uncle?

2 CIT. Quarrel not, friends, tell more tales of blood.

POPE. Prey on, vile scavengers of blood and tears,

I'll to Saint Lawrence Jewry, where of old
He held such eloquent discourse, and there
Make intercession. [Exit.]

4 CIT. It is ill done, to my thinking, in Sir Thomas to put the Pope above our lord the King.

3 CIT. Ay, and to answer frowardly to the King's questioning. Yet may a man mourn for him; he was an honest judge.

5 CIT. Not that only neither, but every way a good man and a kindly. Why, look ye, how many poor hath he not relieved, how many great baulked of their unruly lust? Hath he not returned their moneys to poor suitors, and sheltered widows, dotards, and innocents? Do I not know how he hath stood betwixt my poor soul and the onset of Beelzebub?

Enter more Citizens.

1 WOMAN. God's blessing on him. Cannot they let him go without oaths now, who ever swore fewer than any man in England?

2 CIT. Neighbour, I charge you keep your elbow out of my paunch.

3 CIT. See you say not overmuch, good wife,
for yonder skulketh Pierce Renold, Cromwell's
man, the lean-faced costrel, listening what he
may hear.

CITS. The halberds, the halberds ! See, they are
at hand.

*Enter MARGARET ROPER, MARGARET CLEMENT,
DOROTHY COLLEY, and Young MORE.*

DOROTHY. Mistress, be comforted, look not so
grey.

The King will grant a pardon.

MARG. ROP. Silence, child !
Wake not vain hope, but let me grip my
strength
To comfort him.

MARG. CLEM. 'Tis rather thou than he
Wilt stand in need of strength.

Enter a Sergeant and Halberdiers.

SERG. Make way there, ho !
In the King's name, make way !

*Enter SIR EDWARD WALSINGHAM, MORE,
bearded and leaning on a stick, Halberdiers
and Citizens.*

I WOMAN. Poor gentleman,
How weak and wan !

5 CIT. Yet hath his eye its brightness.

Y. MORE. Father, thy blessing! I have ever
been

A foolish and unprofitable son,
God help me, not unloving.

MORE. Dear to me

Ever since thy first cry, and dearer now
Threefold in this my darkling hour. All
good

Attend thee living, dying, and beyond—
Heaven bless thee! [Y. MORE *retires.*

Wondrous, the deep tone, man's form,
Yest'reen I dangled fruits before his mouth,
He sporting on my knee.

SERG. You may not pass.

MARG. ROP. Let us go by.

I WOMAN. Stay not a daughter's grief.

3 CIT. Shame on ye, soldiers; let the lady be.

[MARGARET ROPER *breaks through the*
halberds, followed by MARGARET
CLEMENT and DOROTHY COLLEY.

5 CIT. How pity doth illumine all her face,
Making her fair that was not so till now!

MORE. Why, Meg, hast broken through the
linked arms?

Shall Joan of Orleans know her fame eclipsed
By Margaret, Dame of Chelsea?

MARG. ROP. It is true,
Sweet father, they have doomed thee?

MORE. They have cut

From my life race the last long weary lap,
A boon indeed, but that I mourn to leave
Sad hearts behind.

MARG. ROP. Sad but a little while

Ere meeting in immortal bliss we stand
Clear from all woes for ever. Speak to these
Who followed me to greet thee.

DOROTHY. Holy Mother,

Save my kind master from these wicked men.

WALS. Peace girl!

MORE. My blessing on thee, little maid.

MARG. ROP. Strive not to speak, dear child.
God knoweth all.

[DOROTHY *withdraws.*

MARG. CLEM. My Father, who didst take me
fatherless

And gavest all I have—

MORE. Yet more received.

Thou hast the algorism stone I sent?

MARG. CLEM. Ay, sir.

MORE. Give greeting to thy husband. Say
I mind me of the time when he and I
Shared our mild labours of the Academe.
I bid him cling to learning, and go hence
Praying for him and thee and for your babes.

[MARGARET CLEMENT *withdraws.*

So thou alone art left. Lift up thy brow.

Kind Heaven, how blanched a cheek ! Be bold,
sweetheart,

What ! didst thou cleave yon line of gleaming
steel,

And wilt not look upon thy father's face ?

MARG. ROP. Would I might look thereon through
days and years,

Till forth from those dear eyes the light of God
Might shine into my soul.

MORE. Not here, not here ;

Mild eyes of little children may reflect
Their Maker's light ; too dim with age are mine,
Too dark with sin and long unworthiness.

But on thine head, fear not, the heavenly beams
Will glide from many places. Thou shalt know
Hereafter household peace, and tenderest love
Well won shall lap thee round, till this bright
hair

Be snowlike, and thine happy spirit pass
'Mid sunset-song of tones full charged with love.

MARG. ROP. Nor peace like serving thee, nor love
like thine !

Ever thou wast my lodestar ; God requite it.
Give me thy blessing, last and richest gift.

MORE. That were a legacy thine own of right,
But, woe is me ! what else have I to give ?

MARG. ROP. The name of Thomas More to keep
and guard.

MORE. That name thine own pure life shall
glorify,
And men will say such offspring might not
grace
One all unworthy.

WALS. Get your parting done,
I pray you, mistress ; we must on.

MORE. Farewell.
Christ and the Holy Mother and all Saints
Guard this white soul which most on earth I
love !

MARG. ROP. God's blessing, oh ! God's blessing
be on thee !

Christ, keep thine own.

WALS. Come, madam, tears avail
But little. Get you rather to your prayers.

3 CIT. I also. Holy Mary, pity them !

5 CIT. How fair is love and simple charity
Without all hope of guerdon.

4 CIT. Hush ye now.

MARG. ROP. Unhand me ; get ye gone ! he shall
not die.

My father, O my father, O my father !

[*She throws herself upon his breast, and is
presently led away by MARGARET
CLEMENT and WALSINGHAM.*

MORE. God's hand hath beckoned. Death hath
done his worst.

A C T V

(1535)

SCENE I.—THE TOWER PRISON.

MORE *alone.*

MORE. It is the eve of holy Thomas. [Kneels.]

Thou

Who gavest on the Canterbury stones,
To shield and to uphold our sacred Church
Against the wrath of majesty, thy life,
No weak, unworthy thing like unto mine,
But fashioned in a mould heroical,
Look on me now and bless, for well I know
This day assigned by Heaven for my death.

[Rises.]

Strange that e'en now when these keen-
darting pains

Which long have grown upon me, would
torment

My body, and the thoughts of death, and
fame

Unrealised, and all untoward things

Crowd on my soul, unwittingly I fall
A-sudden thinking of a time long dead,
Upon the golden threshold of my life.
Men say that to a waveworn mariner,
Dashed from his deck and gulfed in streaming
surge,
Come tinklings of the sheep-bells round his
home:
So to mine ears come long-forgotten sounds
Dear and how sad, nigh and how far away !
Their sweetness like the green of April woods,
Their sadness like the sun on ruinous towers.
Babble and prattle and clamour of infancy,
The many tongues of childhood, sudden
wrath
And sudden tenderness, unbridled joys,
And griefs that lowered immeasurably dark
To eyes which might not pierce beyond their
gloom,
And in a moment passed. How brightly
then
Shone hope undimmed of grave experience,
For boyhood is not wholly brawl and noise,
But hath its upward moments when the soul
Unfoldeth to the music of high dreams
And knowledge and discourse of learned men.
What now? a step—how if it be the call,
The last—the best? am I indeed prepared?

Enter SIR THOMAS POPE

POPE. Vouchsafe me pardon that I break on
thee—

MORE. Good-morrow, friend. Why, what a
gloom is here,

Sad raiment and thy favouradden yet ;
Needs must thou comest with a rueful suit
To lay before the Chancellor. 'Tis pity
Thy trouble should bevain, but these three years
I have laid by mine office with my cares,
And in this radiant palace given me
For guerdon of long labour I repose.
Didst ever see a statelier ? These wide walls,
Fair casements opening upon smiling fields,
Rich hangings, whitest linen, ornament
Half-regal, have they not a goodly air
Like tinted clouds about the setting sun ?

POPE. Thy pardon, sir ; I cannot match thy mirth
Which ringeth strange to me in such a pass.
But what I can, I would ; thy grievous pains—
Can naught assuage them ? Wouldst thou have
me bring
A leech or curious ointments ?

MORE. Let them be.
We may not make our passage heavenward
In feather-beds, for our sweet Lord himself
Went thither painfully with tribulation ;

And for my mirth—why, let that also be,
Since, honour living, mirth should never die
From mere mischance, nor lips be laughterless
Which never were forsown nor smiled away
Another's name. It was but yesternight
In the dead still my thoughts from sacred
things

Wafted I knew not how to a far day
When I beheld a slight, unpractised youth
Throw a skilled wrestler on a village green
By great good hap ; even so methought myself
In this dark matter of the oaths have met
And thrown the devil, though unapt in wiles ;
And thereforethen and since much mirth I made
Forgetful of the ills which compass me.

POPE. Those griefs it is mine office to recall :
At nine o' the clock thou diest.

MORE. And they end,
These worldly ills of mine, and I go hence
Unto my cleansing. Like a trusty friend
Thou bringest joyful tidings.

POPE. Thou art strong.
Would I might bring thee comfort !

MORE. Think not of it.
Dear is thy love and sweet the kindly tears
Which glisten on thy cheek, yet earthly words
Are but as lessening murmurs, for I know
That after preparation I shall win

Eternal comfort from the shining eyes
Of Blessed Mary and the gathered saints.
Ay, truly joyful tidings. Much erewhile
I loved my sovereign prince when he inclined
His ear unto my counsel, raised me up
From simple gentleman to Chancellor
Of all his realm, and oftentimes in speech
Kindly and gentle would enhance my wit
With stintless praises, or in graver mood
Urge me to strong endeavour, bidding me
Look unto God and after God to him :
But this I hold the greatest boon of all,
That he doth grant me a swift passage hence,
And, Heaven be witness, I scarce love him less,
Knowing the majesty of England glassed
In his fair person, though unpleasantly
He look on me and by his will I die.

POPE. He chooseth that you speak not many
words

Upon the scaffold.

MORE. Be it so. In this,
As in all earthly things, I shall obey,
Though somewhat I had purposed—yet no
matter.

Will it be granted, think you, that my child
Attend my burial ?

POPE The King's Majesty
Hath so already given command.

MORE.

Oh then

What gratitude is mine that he should turn
From deep concerns of state, and have a care
For my poor burial.

POPE.

Many mourn for thee.

MORE. Sadlier mayhap than I for mine own
self.

Remember thou, dear proven friend, that
hence

I pass with never malice in my mind
Against a living man. For them who gave
False witness and all else who wrought me ill,
Lord God in heaven, grant them of Thy grace
As free a pardon as Thy suppliant here.
And for the Council—did not blessedèd Paul
Stand by consenting unto Stephen's death?
And now the hallowed twain together rest
Linked in fruition of eternal bliss ;
Even so, if my last breath at all prevail,
Shall they and I, although in earthly courts
They have condemned me, meeting other-
where,

Be merry brethren everlastingly.

POPE. Now must I quit thee. Make thee ready.
Oh,

I cannot speak, but thou dost know my heart.
Farewell !

[Exit.]

MORE. God speed thee ever on thy road,

For thou art wondrous gentle. [Kneels.] Unto
Thee,
From whom I come, to whom at last I go,
This hour is consecrate.

SCENE II.—THE PLACE OF EXECUTION.

Citizens standing and lying about.

- 1 CIT. Long hours have I waited, and am sore
hungered.
- 2 CIT. Time passeth slow.
- 4 CIT. It draweth toward nine o' the clock,
which is reckoned most like to be the hour.
Therefore be of good cheer, old neighbour.
Think you he will prove as bold as those who
died of late?
- 1 CIT. I would give all men's boldness for a
round of brave beef.
- 1 WOMAN. None could die bolder than the
brethren of the Charterhouse. Had I but a
testoon they should have a candle set up for
them at St. Mark's.
- 3 CIT. Keep a still tongue, dame; have a care.
As for boldness, none is like to die bolder than
Sir Thomas. Your hardy, fiery, braggart
sort will look disdainfully on scaffold or
gallows as a conquered kern may look upon
the officer against whom he may not prevail,

yet will not yield unto him by so much as by one tittle. 'Tis your gentle sort, who live meekly and walk honourably, and laugh with eye and not with mouth, that smile on the headsman as he were a friend.

4 CIT. You speak true, but, as I think, Fisher, the Bishop of Rochester, that was late made Cardinal—

3 CIT. Ay, late, and yet too early.

4 CIT. Have that as you will. This Cardinal had somewhat of each of these two dispositions, for men say he ever stood up manfully to Master Cromwell, and dared much, yet, when he came to this pass, he looked more like unto an holy anchorite than to a bishop of thew and sinew, such as he had been esteemed. Slow, slow he walked—thuswise.

1 WOMAN. Say rather, tottered.

4 CIT. Yea, tottered, crucifix in hand, and scarce able to see for the mist that fourscore years had drawn athwart his eyes.

3 CIT. 'Twas a black traitor, primed with Spanish ingots.

4 CIT. Yet he died as thou or I might die, Master Giles, an we come hitherward in malefactor guise.

3 CIT. Saint Giles forbid! Prate not such things to honest folk.

2 WOMAN. Hush thy cries, hush! What ails thee?

CHILD. I am weary and sick for lack of food.

2 WOMAN. 'Food,' quotha? 'food.' What more must thou require at thy mother's hand? Is't not enough that I bring thee to the spectacle? Said I not unto thy brother he should not forth to-day, for that his father brought him to the bear-baiting, and now thy holiday is come? So then I bring thee to the beheading, and thou must needs cry out for food. Get thee home, sirrah, get thee home.

CHILD. Nay, mother, I will not cry again; but will abide silent until the head is dropped.

Enter Fifth Citizen and others.

3 CIT. Hast been at the Tower, neighbour?

5 CIT. Ay, seeking if haply I might chance upon a glimpse of Sir Thomas ere they bring him forth, since he hath in private wrought mightily for me, and I am very fain to throw him my poor thanks. But though my cousin, which is of the Tower Guard, did bring me unto the courtyard, yet I nowise might espy him. Natheless, I spoke with one which had gone along with Master Lieutenant, when he went within to hold converse with Sir Thomas.

3 CIT. What chanced at their meeting?

5 CIT. Why, it had been charged upon Sir Thomas that he should prepare himself for his going forth, and Master Lieutenant looked that he would of a surety array himself sadly, both as fitting the time, and because such apparel as the prisoner weareth, when he is put to death, doth afterwards fall of ancient custom to the headsman's lot. Yet when Master Walsingham entered upon him, he found Sir Thomas attired in a rich gown of silk camlet, which, as he affirmed, was given unto him by his ancient and entire friend Master Bonvisi. Then was Master Lieutenant dismayed at all this gear, and begged of him to change his garments, saying that else the executioner should surely have them, which was but a sorry javill. But Sir Thomas, looking on death as something passing sweet, said only: 'What! shall I account him a javill that will do me this day so singular a benefit?' So for a while he would in nowise be persuaded; but at length, much importuned, he put it off, yet even now he must needs send an angel to the headsman out of his scant store.

3 CIT. He would seem then bosom friend of death.

5 CIT. And is no less. The mourning is all ours who must lament a man, in this scurvy

world, just, open, ready. Hath he not in mine own person powerfully battled with Beelzebub?

3 CIT. Peace, they are at hand.

Enter, amidst a great crowd of Citizens, SIR EDWARD WALSINGHAM, a Sergeant, and Halberdiers, escorting MORE; also the Headsman.

SERG. Stand back, good people; leave the scaffold clear.

MORE. Master Lieutenant, prithee step not fast,
For I have far to go.

WALS. Would you not rest
Ere you ascend?

MORE. That would I—a fell height!
An height, a deep, and last an height beyond;
Three several journeys.

WALS. Can I anything
To ease you?

MORE. Nay, I am at very ease,
Save for this dreary weight of earthly limbs.
A small thing seemeth life and far away,
Death bright and near.

I WOMAN. You are aweary, sir,
Drink of this wine.

MORE. Nay, nay, kind soul, no wine.
I have but lately drunk, and very like

Shall chance ere long upon a crystal spring
For more refreshment.

3 WOMAN. You, Sir Thomas More,
When you were Chancellor, you did me wrong.

MORE. Who crieth?

3 WOMAN. It is I.

MORE. I do recall
Your cause, and were it once again to judge,
You should receive like measure, being in
fault.

3 CIT. He trembleth not, nor changeth not his
hue;

'Tis a brave man.

2 CIT. Said I not he was brave?

1 CIT. Stronger, 'twould seem, in spirit than in
back.

Mark how the cell hath crooked him.

5 CIT. Good Sir Thomas,
Oft hath thy counsel won me from despair
In heavenly matters: now, alas! I cower
This way and that way swaying, much in
doubt,

Sore pressed of fiery devils. Give me aid!

MORE. Go you and pray for me, as I for you.

Let us unto the scaffold. It is steep.

Master Lieutenant, see me safely up,

I pray you; for myself in coming down

I can make shift.

[They go up.]

1 Woman. Alack, woe worth the day!

5 CIT. Ah me, an end of counsel!

MORE. Kind my friends,

I ask your prayers for an unworthy soul.
On you and all ye love and all the world
I here invoke God's blessing. For the faith
Of Holy Church, that Holy Catholic Church
Which reared me, nourished me, enlightened
me,

I go to death. [Kneels and prays.

4 CIT. Zounds! now would I that I had not
come hitherward. There be some things to be
done on this earth that be too pitiful to
behold.

1 WOMAN. Alas, alas!

5 CIT. Hold your peace, friend. Speak not
at all. [Presently MORE rises.

HEADSMAN. Grant me a free forgiveness, noble
sir.

I shall but do my duty as you know.

MORE. Pardon thou needest not; a greater
boon

Thou renderest me this day than mortal man
Can do me; therefore thanks. [Kisses him.

Pluck up thy spirit,

Fear not to do thine office. See, how short
A neck! take heed thou strikest not awry
For saving of thine honesty. Ye fain

Would veil mine eyes? Not so—I have a
cloth

Here by me, and myself will cover them.

God with me! [Kneels down.]

Stay a moment, gentle friend,
My beard doth press the block. Now is it
safe;

'Twere pity that were cut, which never yet
Committed any treason.

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